

J. Rogers

L E T T E R S

Which have passed between

JOHN BEARD, Esq;

Manager of COVENT-GARDEN Theatre,

AND

JOHN SHEBBEARE, M.D.

Wherein, I thus entreat, with due Submission,

Between the Bard and me you'd make Decision,

The Whole now on your Arbitration waits.

PROLOGUE to the PERPLEXITIES,

Sung by Mr. BEARD.

L O N D O N :

Printed for G. Kearsley, in Ludgate-Street.

M,DCC,LXVII.

Advertisement.

THE Comedy which has afforded the subject of the subsequent letters, had been written and lain quietly with the author not less than twelve years; when on reviewing it about three years since, it was imagined that, with many alterations and additions, in this dearth of original compositions for the theatre, it might prove no unacceptable entertainment to the public. These being made it, was delivered to Mr. Beard.

Since the first composition of this piece, the writer of it has never turned his thoughts on dramatic subjects, nor ever more intends it. The difficulty of getting new plays to be received, of which he was fully convinced by the fate of others, was a discouragement sufficient to deter him from proceeding any farther in that path of literature; and the insufficiency of judgment, which at Covent Garden theatre has descended from father to son, he fancies, will be unanswerably evinced by what is to be found in the following sheets, and add no small energy to the preceding discouragement.

The writer of this Comedy having kept it so long unoffered to a manager, and left it with Mr. Beard two years unenquired after, it will certainly appear, that this publication is neither owing to his being sanguine respecting its merits, nor solicitous concerning its being played, but to those reasons which are assigned towards the end of the last letter. The delay of publishing these letters, from the 10th of October to the 25th of February, is owing to a resolution of the writer, not to afford the least pretext for complaining, that he intended to prejudice the success of other dramatic writers, whose pieces had been received, by giving the subsequent letters to the public respecting his own. But as all that had been received at Covent Garden house have now known their fates, that cause of delay is removed. It will be discovered, from what is said in the letters, that this publication ought to be considered as a mutual appeal of both parties to the judgment of the public; and of this subject they are fully qualified to decide, because nothing has passed relative thereto, except what is contained in these letters: nor have Mr. Beard and the writer of the Comedy seen each other since the Play was delivered to that Manager.

LETTERS, &c.

London, Sept. 2, 1766.

SIR,

ABOUT this time two years, when I waited upon you, and offered to your acceptance a Comedy, you informed me that you was engaged for the succeeding season, but that in the following, if it was found agreeable, you would willingly receive it. In consequence of this it was immediately sent for your perusal. Since that time, two seasons have elapsed, and I have received no answer from you. After so long a detention in your hands, I should think myself guilty of injustice to your good character, by entertaining the smallest thought

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that it will not be played the ensuing winter, and as the theatric season is now approaching, I should be much obliged, if you will acquaint me at what time you think it may most conveniently be given to the public.

I am,

Your very humble servant,

To *John Beard, Esq;*
at *Hampton.*

J. SHEBBEARE.

THE ANSWER.

Hampton, Sept. 7, 1766.

SIR,

BEING but just returned to Hampton, from a visit in Buckinghamshire, I did not receive the favour of your's. of the second instant till last night, to which I am sorry it is not in my power to send you an immediate *satisfactory* answer. In ten days, or a fortnight, I shall be in town, when you may depend on seeing or hearing from,

Sir,

Your most humble servant,

To Dr. *Shebbeare.*

J. BEARD.

The

The following letter was sent in consequence of the promise in the preceding.

October 1, 1766.

SIR,

I AM truly concerned that I am obliged to make the Comedy you left in my hands accompany this letter; but the friends I am obliged to consult in affairs of this kind (*as I am answerable to a whole family for the good or ill success of the theatre*) advise that it should not be performed. Their objections are, that the plot is too simple, and the incidents far too few to gratify the general taste, at present.—They add, that the improbability of such contrivances being carried on by a counterfeit nobleman, at so public a place as Bristol Wells, would render the performance very hazardous; and it would be greatly augmented by the many sarcasms throughout the piece on trade and nobility, strikingly nervous as the expressions, and naturally easy as the other parts of the dialogue are.—If there has appeared too much delay in my conduct, I must beg you to impute it, good Sir, to the disa-

greable reluctance with which I return any gentleman's work of genius, and particularly one which comes under the sanction of a name so well known, and justly admired in the literary province as your's. I am really much concerned to be reduced to it, and hope, in justice, you will be so kind to charge your disappointment on the care and duty I owe (as agent) to a whole family, not on the choice or liking of

Your most obedient

Humble servant,

To Dr. Shebbeare,

J. BEARD.

The A N S W E R to the two preceding L E T T E R S.

October 2, 1766.

S I R,

AFTER so long a detention of the Comedy, I know not whether I am more surprized at the apology which you have made for the sending it back, than at the reasons which you assign for the not accepting it. I shall therefore attempt
to

to shew the insufficiency of the latter, and I flatter myself that, when you have considered what I herein transmit you, I shall have no occasion to explain my sentiments on the former.

The first objection of your friends is, that *the plot is too simple and the incidents far too few, to gratify the general taste at present*. In answer to this, I know no better method, than that of appealing to a comparison of this Comedy with others which are played; and when you have shewn me a number of them, in which the incidents are more numerous, diversified and interesting, and the unravelling the whole more natural, unborrowed and unforeseen, I will pay obedience to the criticisms of your friends.

Your next objection is, that *the impossibility of such contrivances being carried on by a counterfeited nobleman, at so public a place as Bristol Wells, would render the performance very hazardous*. In this place, I imagine, by the word *performance*, you mean the success would be rendered hazardous

dous by the scene of action : and this hazard I apprehend would be the case, wherever it can be placed; and is in common to all situations, and to all new exhibitions on the theatre. By the term, impossible, I fancy you mean, improbable; and that you found this improbability on the place being public, and therefore improper to be chosen by the persons who attempt to carry on their intended deceit.

This opinion of *your friends* appears to have arisen from inattention to that rule by which they ought to have judged. They seem to have pronounced this impossibility, from a consideration of things, according to their own characters, and not of those which are delineated in the play. It is probable indeed, that *they* might not have selected such a scene for the transacting an imposition; but certainly there is nothing improbable, that those who have chosen it in the comedy, would have done the same in real life. Public places are, and ever have been, the scenes of such adventurers, and for this reason, among many others, because the presumption of appearing in
 them

them imparts a great degree of credibility to their fictitious characters: a circumstance which ought to have determined the character of Subtle, knowing in mankind, hackneyed in imposture, of a superior cunning which contemns little objects, and driven to such expedients which are only to be accomplished in such frequented places, to have determined on such a public situation. And certainly Wilding and Lucy, who are under his direction, are such from their age and inexperience, who may naturally acquiesce with the judgment of Subtle in this instance.

But let it be supposed that these theatrical personages have mistaken the proper place for carrying on their design; is it any thing unusual, that those, who thro' wrong judgment have adopted fictitious characters, should err in chusing their scene of action? Were there no mistaken opinions in the conduct of men, I fancy comedy would find but few subjects for her exhibitions. Besides, this judgment tends to the disappointment of their designs, and to expose those vices and follies,

lies, which are not so susceptible of it in other places; which is the object intended by the piece. Hence it appears, that the selecting this scene is in every view consensaneous to the characters which I have drawn, and the ends which are proposed; that your friends have judged without a just rule, and determined on fallacious principles; and consequently the common hazard to which all new performances are subject is not encreased by this scene of action.

I come now to your last objection, that *the hazard is augmented by the many sarcasms throughout the piece, on trade and nobility*. This indeed is a curious remark of your friends; since the sarcasms, as they call them, are neither on trade nor on nobility, but on the vices and follies which sometimes attend them. And though your friends, in their censure, seem to conceive that these vices and follies are the very same things with merchants and noblemen, and therefore not to be touched, I am of a different opinion; and am persuaded, that whatever is reprehensible in
either

either rank, is the becoming object of comedy, and may be delineated without the least disparagement either of nobility or commerce. For if degrees of wealth and title are to preclude the inquisition of the comic muse, and impart a sanction to vice and folly, who are to be the objects of her satire? Is the public to be entertained with the adventures of none but highwaymen and beggars?

Besides, Sir, your friends do me injustice in not observing, that there are, in this piece, the characters of a real nobleman of untainted honour, and of absolute use to the *dénouement* of the whole; and a merchant, of singular integrity: how then have I been improperly sarcastical on nobility and trade? Do your friends imagine that commerce and peerage are insusceptible of vice and folly? or that such objects should not be treated with that satire, which they call sarcasm? Satire in such cases has seldom encreased the hazard of success. Tameness and insipidity, and not excess of satire, have been the complaints

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against

against the new comedies which have been latterly exhibited.

From what has been said, you will plainly perceive that, had I been indulged with being present at the reading this piece, as we agreed I should be, every objection of your friends had been fairly obviated. Wherefore, since this is now the case, though you have been determined by their opinions to reject, I doubt not but in consequence of this refutation of them, and in justice, you will be induced to acquaint me with your change of sentiments.

Permit me to add also, that though the criticisms of your friends had proved unanswerable, since they so highly applaud the other parts of this Comedy, by much the more essential, they would still be unequal to a justification of your returning it : because nothing is more easy than changing the scene, and taking the sting from satire; and few plays, I believe, have been offered to a Manager, against which the objections have been so few and ill grounded.

I shall

I shall not at present animadvert on the long detention of this Play, the manner of apologising for that particular, and the sending it back ; nor on the other circumstances of your letter. I shall only observe, on your declaring yourself answerable to a whole family for the good or ill success of the theatre, that if you are responsible to them as Manager, you are in like manner responsible to the public also ; and that if a single family, which receives the profits, be entitled to your precaution, that no piece be injudiciously undertaken ; the whole public, which pays the money, have an equal right, that nothing which deserves acceptance should be refused. Wherefore, as every objection, which your friends have afforded you, is fairly refuted, and the other requisites of a comedy are acknowledged to be in this, I am persuaded you will recall your interdict, and give me no reason to complain that Mr. Beard has ill used me.

I am
P.S. Be pleased
to favour me with
an answer.

Your humble servant,

To John Beard, Esq;

J. SHENBARE.

The ANSWER to the preceding
LETTER.

Oct. 3, 1766.

SIR,

THE variety of affairs, wherein I am
concerned and embarrassed, will not
afford leisure to enter into a more critical
examination of your Comedy, or to sup-
port a longer argumentation on parti-
culars.

Submitting my single opinion to those
of several able judges, and being by my
situation obliged to be *biased* by the will
of others, much more than my own, I
must beg your acceptance of this final an-
swer: The piece you have offered will by
no means answer our purposes, and there-
fore cannot be done.

I again repeat my concern that I must
return any gentleman's production on his
hands, but I cannot avoid it.

If you are severe enough again to ar-
raign my delay, I repeat, that I am very
sorry

forty for it; but it is a fate, which (through the great number of various performances offered to us, and the constant urgency of business to take up my time) must unavoidably attend many.

Had I power to send a more pleasing answer to you, believe me, it would be much more agreeable to,

Sir,

Your humble servant,

To Dr. Shabbare.

J. BEARD.

The ANSWER to the preceding
LETTER.

Oct. 10, 1766.

SIR,

IF any thing could have added to the illiberality with which you have already treated me, it is the cavalier manner in which you have replied to my last letter. For through the tinsel of your civility it is perfectly discerned, either that
you

you cannot invalidate the evidence of what I have offered, and have therefore declined the attempt; or that you think me undeserving your farther notice. A treatment which becomes not you to give, nor me to receive with acquiescence. It seems as if you expected to escape from this dilemma, in which too you will be mistaken, by declaring that your *concerns and embarrassments* will not afford you leisure to enter into a more critical examination of my Comedy, or support a longer argumentation on particulars. Of the number of affairs, in which you are now concerned, I cannot determine; but I can plainly see that your embarrassments will not be diminished by the method which you have taken to be freed from them; and however satisfactory these reasons for declining your duty, for such it is, may appear to you, they are none to me, who am neither concerned nor embarrassed, and have full leisure to pursue you.

Should such an *argumentation of particulars*, in which it has been proved you have made no use of arguments, be received

ceived as an apology for your *present* conduct, in what manner will it palliate the *past*; your having detained the Comedy two years, without having once considered it; and now returning it, because you have not at *this time* leisure to afford it a more critical examination? Have the two theatrical vacations, which have passed since you received this piece, been so replete with *concerns and embarrassments*, that they could not afford you leisure to attend to *that care and duty* which, by your situation as manager, you owe the public, of entertaining them with new performances; and that justice which is due to writers, of not returning these performances, till after an ample examination, and on reasonable objections they are found improper for the stage? This intended excuse of your's therefore, so totally void of all justification, should not have been offered by you, nor can it be accepted by me, till one of us at least has renounced all pretensions to common sense and good manners.

The next stroke of *argumentation* which you offer in your defence is, *that of having*
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submitted your single opinion to those of several able judges, and being by your situation obliged to be biassed by the will of others much more than your own. If these *able judges* be the same persons whom you denominate your *friends*, in the preceding letter, surely no man has ever had less foundation, than yourself, for this change of appellation, nor than they, for this distinction of abilities. Is it not adorning the indigent with stars, who have no coats on which to sew them? Do such critics deserve the name of *able*? and where you could get *several* of them, I am at a loss to guess. Were their names known, you would have no less reluctance to be seen in their company, than Sir John Falstaff had against marching with his scare-crows through Coventry; for the intellectual marks of your *able judges* are not less disgraceful, than the bodily of the plump knight's rag-o'-muffins, and yet they serve to fill a pit as well as better.

Do their abilities consist in their discernment of characters; of the motives on which they proceed, or of those places which ought to be selected
for

for their scene of action? Can the apprehension of being discovered at a public place, be an objection to the choice of it by Subtle, who ought, in consequence of his character, to know that this very circumstance of it's being improbable, which naturally occurs to a diminutive deceiver, is the very reason why a more enlarged and exalted cunning should prefer it. For if it be unlikely, in the general opinion, that men of supposititious characters should repair to such places as are generally imagined to accelerate their discovery, does not their daring to be present at them add the greatest verisimilitude, of their being in reality what they presume to represent, and extinguish almost every spark of suspicion? have they not just reason to select them?

Perhaps a story may illustrate what I have said. "In the reign of James II. one Ferguson, who had plotted against the state, fled from justice to the city of Edinburgh. When perceiving that he was pursued, and that the gates were shut to prevent his escape, he acted on those principles,

ciples which, I suppose, are congenial with the character of Subtle. Instead of secret-
ing himself either in a cellar or a garret,
the expedients of grovelling deceit, he re-
paired to the common goal, in which he
knew an acquaintance of his to be confin-
ed: and thus by this superior stratagem of
chusing that place for his concealment
and escape, which your *able judges* would
imagine he ought to have avoided as that
of discovery and imprisonment, he remained
undiscovered, and escaped."—So much in
opposition to their imputed improbability,
and in defence of my choice of the scene
for the Comedy.

The same Ferguson, being on a similar
occasion, and in like manner pursued, ar-
rived in some town in which there were
many inns, one of which was kept by the
mayor of the corporation. As the fugi-
tive knew that the pursuers must apply to
that magistrate for a search-warrant, that
circumstance determined him on that inn
for his quarters. In consequence of this
design he orders a supper, and invites the
company of Mr. Mayor and his lady.

Whilst

Whilst they were supping, a message arrives to desire a search-warrant for the apprehending one Ferguson. The magistrate being obliged to retire for this purpose, acquaints his guest with the reason of it, and promises to return immediately. Ferguson expressing some concern for the deprivation of his company, adds, that he would converse with his lady till he had the pleasure of his return. This being done, Mr. Mayor enters into conversation on the affair, and ardently wishes the criminal may be apprehended, without the least suspicion of his speaking to the very man. Ferguson, who knew that too much fervour in condemning frequently betrays the consciousness of guilt; and that an attempt to palliate the crime might create a suspicion; both of which are the errors of little cunning, commended the zeal of the magistrate with that discreet coolness which generally accompanies the character of moderation and honesty, and deviated imperceptibly into a conversation upon other subjects. The evening being passed Ferguson retired to his bed, in which he remained till late in the morning. He now

conceived himself as freed from the danger of being apprehended in the house; but he was not equally persuaded of his passing through the town unexamined and securely. In order to obviate this difficulty he calls for his breakfast, and again desires the company of his worship and his lady, which was accordingly complied with. On this occasion he affects a great liking to the conversation of the magistrate, admires his good sense, and laments his being obliged to leave his house that day. However, if his worship would honour him with his company to the next town, and spend the evening with him, he should never forget the obligation, and then he would tarry till after dinner: to which, at the same time, he invited the same company. This seeming politeness being well received, the request was granted. Dinner being finished, Ferguson, in company with the Mayor, not only passed through that town, but spent the evening in another, unexamined and unsuspected; and by these means escaped the pursuit. And this part is not only apt to the character which Subtle adopts, but to the place
and

and persons which he has chosen to frequent.

Here it may be fairly inferred, that your *able judges* are entirely mistaken in their critical examination of the Comedy. They have not discerned that Subtle, in consequence of the refined and superior address of a complete impostor, and the celebrated maxim of Rochefocault, that "*Ce que nous prenons pour la sincérité n'est souvent qu'une fine dissimulation pour s'attirer la confiance des autres,*" assumes the most disinterested appearance of probity, and precludes even the suspicion of imposture; nor that he is contrasted with the mean and creeping cunning of the merchant. A character which, though the means by which he intends to deceive may not be foreseen, is still eternally creating the persuasion that he designs it: and in this manner awakening the vigilance of all who are concerned with him, he prevents the accomplishing the very purposes which he pursues.

In this instance these different deceivers play their respective dissimulations against each

each other ; in which the Merchant is seen through and indulged by Subtle, who remaining undiscovered by the Tradesman, dupes him to his purposes ; yet in the end both are disappointed. In fact, if shadows may be compared to substances, the pourtrait of Subtle was intended to resemble in comedy, what the character of Iago is in tragedy ; but the power of experiencing before the proper judges, in what manner I have drawn it, you have thought fit to deny me.

Notwithstanding, Sir, in the conduct of this transaction between us, you have been pleased modestly to renounce all pretensions to the merits of the *critical examination and argumentation on particulars of the Comedy* ; and though I am not entirely pleased with your treatment of me ; you will find that no displeasure of mine can prevent me from bringing latent excellence into public view, and doing justice to your desert. I am persuaded that, notwithstanding the delicacy of your declining the honour of the remark, that *the vices and follies*, which I make the incidental, and your judges, as you would persuade me, the constant and universal cha-

characteristics of peers and merchants, so flagrant even, that their being conscious of the truth of it would hazard the success of the performance, is all your own. For certainly you do not think the hazard would arise from the other ranks of the people. In theatrical entertainments men seldom dislike the satire which is intended for others, and cannot touch them.

And indeed, Sir, to speak in the style of one who, it is not impossible, may be of the number of *your able judges*, I apprehend you are taken with the manner (vide Jacob's Law Dictionary) for it can hardly be believed that Mackheath can forget what Lockit has so repeatedly delivered in the following words,

When you censure the age,
Be cautious and sage,
Lest the courtiers offended should be;
If you mention vice and bribe,
It's so pat to all the tribe,
Each cries it was levell'd at me.

And now, Sir, in spite of your modesty, the honour of the above remark ought to be placed to your account, with this additional

ditional improvement, that what the *Manager* of Newgate has ascribed to courtiers only, the *Manager* of C. Garden theatre has extended universally to the right honourable body of the Peers, and the respectable of the Merchants. And in this place, if you were not more accustomed to the attention of what is sung than what is said, I should be at a loss to account for your disregard to that, which immediately preceding in prose, proceeds from the mouth of the said *Manager* of Newgate. *Such language, brother, any where else, might turn to your prejudice; learn to be more guarded, I beg you.* You seem not to have distinguished, that what may come with propriety from Lockit in Newgate, is unpardonable in you. Thus, Sir, in complaisance to your *double* character, I have inserted both poetry and prose: that, if it please you, you may sing one and say the other. And so disinterested am I, that I most sincerely hope you will speedily receive your full reward for this liberal remark, which I think it will be in vain for you, at present, to deny to be your own.

After

After all, Sir, if my zeal to bring forth, bashful merit has led me into an error, and you have really submitted your single opinion to the *abilities* of your *judges*, the politeness of the above remark must be assigned to them : but of this you must decide among yourselves. I only wish that a due remuneration may fall on the proper person. Should the latter be the case, I own it is an unwarrantable submission in you, since, in order to decide of *their abilities* in criticism, and to submit to their decrees, *you* ought to be qualified to judge on the subject which is criticised. I fancy no man will be allowed to be a proper judge of the abilities of those who pretend to understand painting, unless he can form a judgment of the pictures also on which their judgment has been made. I apprehend the decisions of the judge are to be compared with the objects of them; and the degrees of their abilities to be determined from the comparison. From hence, Sir, if you are not qualified to decide on the merits of a theatrical performance, you are in the same predicament respecting the judges who are proper for such an un-

dertaking. And indeed the truth of this observation is evinced by you, and your judges: *they*, in their criticisms, betray the insufficiency of *their* understandings, and *you* of *your* own in submitting to them.

If these gentlemen believe themselves to be the *able judges* which you represent them; and free from the embarrassments and concerns in which you are engaged, oblige me with the favour of a meeting with them. And to this, if they are convinced that their remarks are right, they can have no just objection: more particularly as I promise inviolably to conceal their names, if they chuse it. In this conference, then, if they can support the criticisms which they have made, I will as chearfully acknowledge *their* superiority, and my defects; and as willingly recede from all pretensions to the reception of the play, and even from all complaints of your disingenuous usage in detaining it so long unnoticed, as *they* or *you* can desire. But if I am not indulged with this equitable request, I must consider them either as men ashamed of their critical reflections, or as conscious
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of their having been influenced by sinister motives, and therefore skulking in the obscurity of not being known, in order to perpetrate what they dare not attempt to justify in the light of their proper persons.

And on this occasion it may not be amiss for you to recollect, that at no very great distance of time, and probably in consequence of your submission to the same *able judges*, when you altered the usual prices at the theatre, you were reduced to the no very pleasing condition of publicly apologizing for the offence, and retracting the cause of it. Wherefore, as a friend, and probably a truer than your *able judges*, I just take the liberty of hinting it possible, that something similar to that which has already intervened on the subject of the price, may again prove to be the event of your precluding an entertainment.

So much being said on your judges, I come now to consider those persons by whose *will*, you say, you are obliged to be *biassed*: and these, I presume, are the *family* of which you speak in your second letter.

ter. And in this place, on a reconsideration of the matter, I am induced to believe that this *family* may at once be both the *friends* and the *able judges* of which you have spoken: and then they will consist of two old women, an High German page, and a woollen-draper, of whom the two last are acknowledged to be *by far* the best judges of theatrical productions. Not that I intend by this declaration to depreciate your excellence, but in conformity to that laudable comportment in which you confess yourself to be ruled by *able judges*, and *biased* from the right line of justice, by the obliquity of the wills of your family. Now, as it must be presumed that the will of these persons proceeds from the result of critical examination, for surely such *able judges* would not have willed the preclusion of a Comedy, without having previously sat in judgment on it, I cannot avoid lamenting the aukward fate of *your* being obliged to be *biased* by such a tribunal, and *that*, still more humiliating, of the *numerous dramatic writers* who, you say, have been subjected to their examination, and rejected by their decrees.

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However, since things are thus circumstanced, respecting you and your family, I hope you will pardon a friend's intrusion, as it is intended to alleviate your distress and to please the town. In this I flatter myself with the approbation of your friends and judges, whether they be or be not the same persons with your family. What I shall propose is this, that the foreign and woollen patentee, who do, as you acquaint me, both *judge* and *will*, be at least added to, if not entirely trusted with the management: and for this reason, because the managers of theatres ought to have some *judgment*, and be free from the *will* of others, the public excepted.

And now permit me, without offence, as I have proposed the alteration in the Managers, to indicate the different departments for which both nature and education have mutually conspired to form them. First then, no unprejudiced person can deny that the German patentee may, with the utmost approbation, assume the province of criticising the grammar, elegance, sublimity, humour and propriety of the style

style of those pieces which may henceforth be offered to your house. And his wool-len brother, whose knowledge in mankind at least, is equal to that of the German in the English language, may as consistently examine the truth and preservation of the characters, the scenes, incidents, conduct, plot, *dénouement* and object of each performance. And you, Sir, emancipated from the servility of being obliged to obey the will of others, shall be exalted to the glorious state of exerting your own, and of running according to your own biases. And more particularly, as you have lost your hearing, to *your care and duty* the music shall be committed; for as I value myself on the ability of my judgment, in this distribution of departments, as much as I do that of your *able judges* on my Comedy, I would not have it suggested that you are more defective in qualifications for your employment than your two brothers, who are so specifically adapted to the perfect discharge of the *cares and duties* which are assigned them.

In reflecting on this particular part, I confess there arises a paradox, which I am incapable of solving. I cannot reconcile in what manner you have been *biased* by the *will* of your patentee *family* on the the third of October; who on the first of the same month declare, that *you were answerable to them for the good or ill success of the theatre*. It must certainly proceed from some sudden and oppressive act; that you, who are *obliged* to be *biased* by the will of *others*, should at the same time be *responsible* for the events of *your* disobedience. You should undoubtedly be either not answerable, or not obliged. Such an injunction is the very inversion of all justice: and even a king's serjeant will give it for law, whether he has or has not any, that those who *judge* and *will* are to answer for the effects of them; and not the agent, who in this instance is to carry them into execution. But as I am fond, on all proper occasions, as you may observe, to become your apologist, I am persuaded that as in consequence of the decay of your organs of hearing, you deviate into disagreement with

with the music of the orchestra; so, in like manner, that it is from a decline of memory that you wander into discord of facts in your relations of them. And in this place I do expect you will acknowledge my kindness in freeing you from this *embarrassment and concern*, since your accounts would seem to be otherwise irreconcilable. Such being the altered state of your faculties, I cannot avoid most sincerely to bewail the misfortune of the public, who are thus cruelly deprived of that man, for surely no one will presume to say that he is the same with the honest and good natured Johny Beard, who before the fatal day on which he was suddenly seized with a fit of mania that effected his head, was universally esteemed to sing both in tune and time; and to deliver his relations with politeness and consistency. For these reasons, and because I am apprehensive you may not yield a due attention to my advice, I could wish your *able judges* would *once*, at least, become your *faithful friends*; and prevail on you neither to sing any more songs to the public, nor to give any more relations of things in letters which may be given
to

to them. And though, like the archbishop of Granada who, through vanity and self-conceit, despised the wholesome council of Gil Blas on a similar occasion, you should reject the former part of my advice, I am not without hopes that you will be prevailed on to observe the latter.

Having advanced thus far, I am come to that passage, in which you so cavalierly tell me, that *the piece which you have returned will by no means answer your purposes, and therefore cannot be done*: and indeed as in this declaration consists the whole strength of your argumentation I agree with you, and candidly confess that it will not answer your purposes; but I am not, at the same time, persuaded that on that account it ought not to be *done*.

My reasons for co-inciding with you in opinion respecting your purposes, are that they seem expressly designed to delude the town with sing song, coronation and pantomine; at once to corrupt the public taste and pervert the true ends of theatrical exhibitions. In this manner the means of turning vice and folly into

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ridicule,

ridicule, and of rendering them contemptible, more particularly in those whose examples are the most prevalent, are purposely precluded; and the heart is prevented from melting into acts of human kindness, and from being incensed with horror against cruelty and oppression in favour of virtue in distress.

Nor are these the only purposes you are suspected of pursuing. Do you not depreciate all new compositions of rational amusement; and deter those men of letters, who have a true sensation of the liberal pride of writing well, from attempting to exercise their talents on dramatic subjects? can such men acquiesce with the dissingenuous usage and preposterous decisions, which they are convinced they shall receive from *you, your friends, your family, and your judge?* And all this you presume to act through fear the town may be reclaimed from their present pursuit of futile, if not pernicious entertainments, by the representation of good sense and just satire. In this manner, with playing and vamping old plays, reviving Squire's of Alsatia, and converting old opera's into new, of which not a few
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in decency ought to be exploded, whilst you are supinely indulged with acquiring an annual revenue, of not so little as a clear ten thousand pounds, by the works of dead authors; you are ungratefully depressing the merits of the living, and precluding them from the benefit of third nights, which would then travel from your to their pockets: and these are more than the suspected reasons, that by every means you endeavour to prevent the reception of new plays: Nor are they withheld from these advantages alone; the remuneration of the public applause, which to men of ingenuity and learning, is infinitely more endearing than pecuniary reward is by the same means impracticable to be given or received.

Thus Sir, whilst you are with difficulty prevailed on to gratify your indulgent audiences with * two new performances in the year, and sometimes less, of the many which, you say, are offered to your house, and of which, in conformity to your *purposes*, I am persuaded, your friends and *able judges* chose the *worst* to the *best* of their knowledge, the Parisians are entertained

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* This year has proved an exception to the number, but this letter was written on what had been performed in former seasons.

tained with not less than ten : and who, though they admire the superior genius of writers and of comedians long since no more, do not think proper to reward the mediocrity of players with advantages unknown to their predecessors, and to deny to an equal excellence in writing, what has constantly been deemed to be the inherent right of men of literature ; but thus protecting them from the arbitrariness and insufficiency of Managers, give to genius that encouragement without which it can not long survive.

This is an example which greatly deserves imitation, and which I doubt not, will be speedily followed in this land ; for it has already been a too long and a too just reflection on our manners, that Englishmen, who have proved themselves so much superior to the French in arms, should remain so insensible to the oppression of men of letters from the hands of theatric managers. But this complaint will, I flatter myself, be soon removed by a free, a brave and generous people, who, enriching Patentees with East-Indian riches, have an indubitable right to interfere in the choice

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of those pieces which are intended, and in the protection of those writers who endeavour to entertain them with rational amusements. Thus in delineating *your purposes* which my Comedy will not answer, they become *my* just reasons why, to speak in your style, it ought to be *done*.

I come now to the apologies which you make on your delay in returning the Comedy, a piece in which you and your judges allow the expressions are *strikingly nervous*, and the other parts of the dialogue are *naturally easy*. So far than your *able* judges approve it. And since their other objections are refuted, it is not *naturally easy* to alledge why it should not be played. Do you and your judges imagine me to be caught by the dazzling of fine words, like a lark with a twirling glass, and to fall plump into the net of flattery so conspicuously spread? or like a child with sugar plumbs, to be kidnapped into an acquiescence by this deal of candied courtesie expressed in the terms of *work of genius*, and particularly one which comes under the sanction of a name so well known, and so justly admired in the literary province. And yet

alas, with all these pompous praises on my parts, you withheld the production of this genius two whole years without deigning to consider it; and there it might have rested quietly inurned till the general conflagration, for it seems it is never to come to a day of judgment, had I not reminded you of it. If you are truly persuaded of the veracity of what you say respecting me, it aggravates not a little the treatment you have shewn me. If not, it still adds to it in supposing that I could be ensnared by such an ill timed and caricatured adulation.

But in truth I am suspicious that *you, your friends, and judges*, have committed no less, though an opposite mistake in their judgments on me, than on the characters of my Comedy. For since the receiving your filken compliments, I have brought myself before my own critical tribunal, a situation in which the culprit is pretty sure of receiving the indulgence of the judge; and after due examination, I really do not perceive all these great qualifications in myself which you are pleased so liberally to bestow upon me. Nay I shall prove, by a comparison, not very flattering to myself,

self that you are of the same opinion, notwithstanding *all the praise woorts you dis-
utter.*

Let me suppose then a shoe-maker, two years since, had sent you a pair of shoes, and you, keeping them till now, had found by *critical examination* that *they would not answer your purposes*, and could not be worn: let me suppose also that Crispin called for his money, when instead of discharging the debt, you return him the shoes, do you imagine the gentle craft will take them back? No, he will swear, that since you had retained them so long, and prevented their being offered to another customer, you should keep them; and this your king's serjeant will allow to be law.

Can you then and your *able judges* believe me to be all *genius and name, and just admiration and sanction*, when you have treated me with less respect than a shoe-maker; and yet expect me to acquiesce in it more quietly than the gentle craft, and all this without your attempting to shew, why a play-wright should have his manu-
factures

factures returned on worse terms than other mechanics. If *one* of your friends believes the fine things which you have said of me, he hath as presumptuously assumed the character of an *infidel*, as of an *able judge*, since *his belief* of my cleverness is much greater than *my own*; the latter of which is seldom of the smallest size in the head of an author,

If the *care and duty* which you owe your *little family*, who are gorged with riches, supersede that *care and duty* which are due to the *large family* of the public who enrich them, and they approve your conduct, I am satisfied on that head. But believe me, Mr. Beard, I am not to be charmed by sweet words; not even where they put in to sweet verse by your *friend*, set to sweet music by Dr. Arne, and sweetly sung by yourself. And I am persuaded you will think it no degradation of your excellence, when I prefer the melody of your voice, and your skill in singing, to the exquisiteness of your judgment in theatric pieces: because the whole nation have confessed your title to the former, and you yourself have disclaimed it to the latter.

After

After all I can prove, you did accept the play, more evidently than *you, your friends, able judges, and family* can prove the justice of your objections against it. The only question I ask in my first letter is, *at what time you think the Comedy may most conveniently be given to the public.* And to this you reply, *it is not in your power to send me an immediate satisfactory answer.* Now what can be a *satisfactory* answer to such a question, but an acceptance of the play? and by the term *not immediate*, ought not I to conclude that such an *answer* would *follow*? You can hardly believe, after the reasons which I have assigned to the contrary, that I can be *satisfied* with what you have since written. Pray ask a king's serjeant, whether my title be not good in law; and then I dare say he will be as truly my advocate, as on another occasion, when one of them took ten guineas from me at night, and deserted me the next morning. And, as the injurer seldom forgives the person he has injured, I may peradventure be no less indebted to the ability of his judgment, and the zeal of his services on this occasion, than the former. However, if he should most un-

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expectedly

expectedly deliver his opinion in my favour, it would be but theatrical justice that you should submit to the ability of his judgment in this instance, as you have to those of your judges on the Comedy.

There is yet another reason, for your having so long detained the play, which seems as extraordinary as any you have offered; and this is the disagreeable reluctance with which you return any gentleman's work of genius. If the reluctance in returning it was so disagreeable, why did you not keep, and bring it on the stage? You cannot say I pulled it from you. And if this disagreeableness still remains, let me know, and it shall immediately be sent back to you; for believe me, Sir, I am both ready and willing to do you all manner of agreeable services on this head; therefore pray use no ceremony, but command me.

And now, Sir, after all that has been said, should your implicit submission to your able judges, your obligation to be bid by your family, your care and duty for their interest, the disagreeable reluctance of returning the play, and all the sweet complements

plements to the bargain, be accepted as an apology for you, as Manager of the theatre, yet as master of the ceremonies at Hamstead, how will you exculpate yourself for this breach of politeness, and for the contempt with which you have treated me? Perhaps you may answer, that you was then John Beard, the singer and servant of the Patentee, and now that you are John Beard, Esq; Patentee, Manager, and Master of the Players, and that, as manners and men too change with circumstances, you lay claim to that plea, in vindication of your conduct. General as the precedent may be, and satisfactory as you may conceive it in your favour, I cannot willingly accept your last letter as your final answer.

In this manner, having almost concluded what I fancy will prove to be my final answer, I submit to your option, either to accept the play, to afford me an interview with *yourself* or *able judge's*, in order that *their* arguments or *mine* may be justified or refuted; or to offer me sufficient reasons, since the subject is of a public nature, why both your and my letters

should not be published. And should you think proper to refuse all compliance with this reasonable proposition, I shall consider it, as undoubtedly you will design it should be, as a plenary consent to the publication of them, and proceed accordingly.

To this business I have more inducements than, perhaps, you may readily imagine. In the first place my tenderness for you, in hopes the public, from this representation of your sad condition, may be prevailed on compassionately to free you from the thralldom of submitting to such friends and judges, and from the obligation of being *biased by your family of Patentes*; a circumstance which as an Englishman and a lover of liberty, you cannot but approve. In the next place, in resentment of the arbitrary and disingenuous usage which, in your last letter, you confess to have attended many other writers, and who probably possess more merit than I do to entitle them to the hereditary claim of having their pieces received on the theatre, and yet who may not possess, as I do, the authentic evidence of such treatment under your own hand. And lastly, that
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the public may be convinced of the truth of what has been so often said, the inattention and contempt which you manifest of such persons who write, and of such performances as are written for their entertainment.

It is in consequence of these considerations, and not of your unpoliteness, that I am chiefly induced to the permitting the publication of the letters which have passed between us on this subject; and, that you may have no pretext for complaining that I have not transmitted to you all that is intended to be made public, or not affording you an opportunity of recalling a premature decision concerning the Comedy, I have sent you this letter in manuscript, which, as it is something long, and to save me the trouble of transcribing it for the press, would otherwise have been delivered to you in print, and now, Sir, I attend a *second final* answer.

I am,

Your humble servant,

J. SHEBBEARE.

P. S.

I have

P. S. In reviewing your and my second letter, I find myself mistaken in reading and writing impossibility for improbability, and as I am as well inclined to acknowledge my errors, as I am to your friends and you to be your own, and as I have derived no advantage from it, but have considered it as meaning improbability, I intend printing that letter exactly as it has been sent you, that you may have no foundation to say that I have written one thing to you, and published another to the world.

To John Beard, Esq.

That you may have no occasion for complaining that I have not transmitted to you all that is intended to be printed, or not allowing you an opportunity of recalling a promise made in consequence of the Comedy, I have sent you the letter in manuscript, which, as it is a thing long, and to save me the trouble of transcribing it for the press, would otherwise have been delivered to you in print, and now, Sir, I attend a second answer.

I am,

Your humble servant,

J. SHEPHERD